

SAMPAN



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Newton's Growing Asian Community



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THE SAMPAN

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STORIES

The Way Back to Now

(Li Min Mo is a storyteller, writer and artist living in Cambridge. She will perform "Night River - The Healing Power of Memory" Dec. 14 at 7:30 p.m. at Club Passim in Cambridge.)

When my daughter was 4 years old I decided I wanted to study theater because I wanted to learn how to speak English. I wanted to get out of my so called cocoon and overcome my inhibitions. Storytelling came right out of doing theater in the late 1970s.

In 1982 I auditioned for the Mass Cultural Council and got accepted into their roster of storytellers who would visit schools. In those days they had a very classical audition process. As usual I was ignorant, but ignorance has actually been my savior. I went there to audition and I saw ballet dancers come out of the audition room; I saw cello players come out, and I said, Oh my god, I'm not a classically trained person, what's going to happen to me? And I went into this huge dance room, and there was a row of men judges sitting at a big long table. It was like a movie. And they were all sitting looking very wooden and stiff. And I said, OK, I'm going to die today. These judges are going to kill me and that is it. I will not be able to crawl out of this room.

And I started praying for the first time, very deeply, speaking to my ancestors and calling them. And I said, Oh I don't know how to speak in Chinese; I don't know how to do that kind of language in Chinese; I said I'm going to speak to them in English because they're going to hear me. And so basically when I'm performing the story, the whole underlying subtext was my great-grandfather, my great-grandmother. I was saying: Please hold me, keep me, I am weak, don't abandon me, tell me how to move every single second, because these people are going to kill me (laughs). That's all. I put myself right there on the battle front. I'm just praying with all the might I can muster. I had never prayed my whole life. But again, innocence helped me; I was totally sincere. The result was that I saw one judge, a black man, smiling. I don't think he was supposed to do that. I broke one person out of the five or six judges there. He was smiling, he was nodding; I said, I have made god open his eyes. So I knew I didn't care whether I had passed that audition or not. Three days later they called me and said I had been accepted as a storyteller to get funded by the state. It was very big in those days.

I think it's not so much the moral in tales which I communicate through my stories. I think it's more about my enthusiasm for life, my excitement about living. That's what kids get out of seeing me. I am not afraid to express my total love, my excitement at seeing you, at seeing her, and just being here. It's just so exciting that we're alive and are being delighted by whatever activity we do. As an artist you already see things as a whole; you don't just see the parts. That's the good thing about art.

What creates that enthusiasm? Well there has been a lot of tragedy in my life. My father was dragged away by the Communists right in front of my eyes in Shanghai when I was a little child. My mother passed away after struggling with cancer for a couple of years. My daughter had spinal meningitis when she was only 1 year old and we had to rush her to the hospital. We saved her just in time. One time I was walking through the snow when a manhole cover blew three stories into the sky. Snow and salt went into a gas vent and the vent blew up just as I was walking by. Before I stepped on it I heard a voice saying: Don't step on it. So I walked around it. People thought I was dead. They heard this loud explosion. I guess what I'm really trying to say is that tragedy teaches you not to dwell on things. Move forward. And if you are always present and moving forward you can be saved. I think people suffer because they're constantly thinking about the last moment rather than now. It's very hard, but it's a Zen teaching.

When I was a kid, every time something bad happened and I was in the middle of feeling really sad and miserable something incredible would happen. For example, we had been moving around and we finally moved into this new house in Taiwan in the middle of a rice paddy. I didn't have

any friends; I didn't know the neighbors. It was very weird moving from Hong Kong, where there were many high-rise buildings, to this totally open space, to a house surrounded by rice paddies. I think it was pretty sad. But one morning I woke up at maybe 4 or 5 with the rooster crowing. I looked out my window and saw a beautiful large crane there. And just that itself was a form of awakening. I'm constantly being woken. Other people call it an epiphany. But that was just being woken by life. Just when I was totally drowning, bang, blast, I am somewhere else, yet I am here. I was constantly being brought back to here.



Li Min Mo with her sculpture in her Cambridge home. R. O'Malley photo

It definitely was very difficult for me when I was an adult to get back to that space. How did I get back to it? It was through experiencing more tragedy. I remember right after the fire (in her Cambridge home), I would just say, Oh my god, this is it. What are we going to do? We don't have any place to live. We'll probably have to go to a Salvation Army shelter. The house was all boarded up with plywood. But we decided to move back in. I remember I really didn't want to be in this box covered with plywood but we decided it would be better to be here rather than go to a strange motel. This is the place where we felt most comfortable even though it's all boarded up.

So I remember there were all these buckets along the wall because there was a big hole in the roof. And I would hear the sound of the water dropping into all these buckets. The snow was melting down and dropping into these buckets. And I remembered reading about the water clock, the ancient Chinese way of measuring time. I felt like, OK, what else can I do but measure time with each drop: bing, bing, bing. I wake up in the middle of the night and feel I'm at the end of the world and suddenly I hear in every corner of the room: bing bing, bing, bing bing, bing. I said, OK, I'm here. The bing, bing, bing is a very tragic bing bing bing, but it's telling me I'm here. That place of now. I'm constantly being yanked there with my feet kicking. It's like the way a Zen teacher will sometime hit you with a stick. I'm constantly being hit. So there were always these things to pull me out. And they were not what other people might call miraculous (laughs), but those were the moments that would save me.

My life in a lot of ways has taught me that everything could go up in smoke. All my art work was burned in the fire. My life in a lot of ways is a big long teaching that I cannot get away from. If I had a cozy life, and had a lot of angels who were helping me out all the time I probably would not have arrived at this place. I would say that wisdom does come in the most difficult manner. And also in a surprising manner. If I've gotten wiser it's because I have lived a bitter life but yet I don't want to be bitter. What's the point? That's how I got to this place. It's not by choice. It's my karma to be saved again and again, every time.

I'm a non-practicing Buddhist but my writing and my art really express my Buddhist faith. It's constantly looking for the line between sympathy and compassion. Compassion is really complete acceptance of a lot of things, and sympathy is just a matter feeling sorry for others' misfortunes. To be human we should at least have the courtesy of

feeling sympathy but compassion actually comes from work, from practice, from really understanding human suffering, the human dilemma. So I work on it, just like I work on writing. I say writing is the last lesson. I have to learn how to do it whether I like it or not. It's like beating that little wooden fish that the Buddhists beat. The fish is based on the story of Tan Seng who goes to India to get the Buddhist teachings. On his way back the teachings get swallowed by this big fish. They keep hitting the big fish's head and eventually retrieve all of the teachings except one. Now they have to beat the wooden fish head to get the last teaching. I think the metaphor is wonderful because you're probably never going to get that last teaching. It's almost like, if you did get it you wouldn't be sitting here; you'd be floating up there somewhere. I'm just sitting here beating on a wooden fish head. That's what writing is to me.

My monologue is about my being depressed for a long long time, starting from the 70s when I got pregnant and had the baby. It's about not really feeling like I had a place in the world and feeling like I couldn't get up in the morning or really do anything. Except the children make you perform your everyday chores, which sort of puts you in an almost monastic routine. You had to do those things. Reading them the same nighttime children's stories for a whole year became like a mantra. It's comforting.

Then I got into cooking professionally. I call that the alchemy of all the elements. Now you can feel comfortable. Now you're not going to get up every morning and cry. Now can you start working on the alchemy of

all the elements. And you know that if you feel really bad or sad your food is going to make someone get sick. So you had to feel sort of together and respect all of the ingredients and be very patient.

And then I move on to my body. The theater training is really about my body. You can take care of other people; now you can start taking care of yourself; you can start respecting your body and learning that your body is not just you; it's the house where your soul is and the house where your ancestors are. I didn't know that until I went to every part of my body and was suddenly touched by my ancestors. It finally ends with the body. By working with the body I'm working with everything, with the past, the future, the present; that's what the body is all about.

What I learned is there's so much poetry, so much story, so much language in your body. And you're just so afraid of it but there's nothing to fear. Your body codifies everything. When I was a kid I used to love to climb trees. I had a totally fearless body which I no longer seem to think I have. The minute I bring that memory back, I have that strength again. It's not memory per se. It's that emotion; it's that strength you used to have; it's the muscles, the nerves, the reactions; it's an entire being.

When I was a child I had the fearlessness of a hunter. Fearlessness is very important for an artist and for any person. I had this fearless quality inside me but there were always those tragedies and terrible things constantly squashing that sense of fearlessness. You can become totally squashed and unable to rise up from that. Sometimes tragedy doesn't have to be the big tragedy. I happened to go through a global tragedy, but a lot of people just have their tiny town tragedies. They're all damaging for a child. They're not equal because the way people react to them is different. Some people lose 10 teeth and they're still jolly. Some people just get a scrape and they're crying for days. Some people get lucky. Nothing ever allowed me to sail through it easily.

The monologue ends with my reclaiming those stories. It's finding a way to root myself. The stories will help me root myself, whether my own stories or my uncle's stories or my grandma's stories. They'll help me know where I belong, where I am standing. It's finding that place, finding a home in that place. It's very hard. Because we are attached to a lot of little things and we can't let ourselves be free to take this journey. This journey to here, to where you're supposed to be, returning to the knowledge that this is everything, this is your past, this is your future, and you can own it.

-Interview by Robert O'Malley

INTERVIEW

Telling It as It Is in China

By Cecilia Wong

Journalist Hui Yin and her son Wuxhen are living together for the first time, but they had to leave China to do it.

The only reason they can live together now is that Yin, a Chinese TV journalist and writer affiliated with China Central Television (CCTV) in Beijing, has been spending the year as a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, where she is studying media policies and American journalistic practices.

Because of China's one child per family policy, Yin's 10-year-old son has never been able to stay with his mother and 12-year-old sister, Wuao. Wuxhen was recently under the care of his grandfather in China, but for most of his formative years he was passed from family to family. Yin says she paid a woman in China to look after him. Her son was able to join her in America two months ago because Yin had registered him as his sister's twin brother. In his passport, Wuxhen has the same birthday as his 12-year-old sister.

Yin's story is not an uncommon one in China. Under an autocratic Communist regime, a simple affair such as deciding how many children to have becomes the business of the state. In China, it's the government, not the citizens, that has ultimate control over many important details of daily life. Government control isn't a new issue for Ying. As a journalist she knows all too well that freedom of the press in China has often been violated - and continues to be violated - by censorship.

According to Yin, TV stations have mushroomed across China, particularly after the economic reforms of 1993, when it became possible for station operators to make money. "Advertising and commercials were unheard of 15 years ago," Yin said. "But now, commercials have become a new source of revenue for TV and radio programming. TV and radio stations no longer have to rely solely on government-funding."

Yin said most of the improvements in programming have been motivated by profits. "If there's no money, they won't change anything," said Yin, who notes that there are no privately held TV or radio stations in the country.

"How can you tell whether there are political changes taking place in China?" she asked, rhetorically.

"The day when China begins to have its first independent newspaper, an independent magazine, an independent radio station, and last, but not least, an independent TV station, then you'll know that there are real changes in China," Yin said.

Yin said the quality of TV programming has improved steadily within a relatively short period of time in China, despite the fact that it's one of the most tightly controlled sectors of national life. But certain practices in TV journalism remained unchanged. The 7 p.m. news, which is watched by almost everyone, continues to sound more like the reading of a laundry list than a Western-style news program. Moreover, she continues, news stories do not involve research, reporting, interviewing, or interpreting.

The language of much television news content is also a problem, she says. The meaning of live speeches by top leaders and officials are often difficult to understand because much of their content is obscured by "bureaucratic speak," Yin said. The most you can get out of it is a superficial sense of the speaker's "friendliness," "warmth," or "coldness," she noted.

The noon-time news format, however, has been changing over the last couple of years. The new format is based on the order of importance of the day's international and national events. Before that, she notes, events about China always took precedence over events occurring in other countries. The noon-time news segment is aired three times a day.

Prime-time evening and nightly TV programming tend to be entertainment-oriented, Yin said. For one thing, it's easier for the station to raise money from this kind of show. Also, shows on parties and social gatherings are much simpler to produce, she added.

Yin lamented the fact that so many people are watching the same show every night, even if its of poor quality. For example, she said, 10 years ago a show called "Around the World" attracted as many as 800 million viewers. "I'd think this would be a significant number for US commercial networks, but it's not unusual to have an audience

of this size in China," she added.

According to Yin, she and other producers introduced a news magazine show on CCTV in 1993 called "Oriental Horizon," which began broadcasting in the fall of 1993. It aired three times a week on CCTV's three major channels.

"Oriental Horizon" represents a major departure from the rules of complete government control and financing, Yin said. The shows were supported entirely by revenues from advertising and their finances were kept separate from CCTV's central government funding. For the first time talents from outside the official pool were hired on a contractual basis. This represented a major change from the past practice of hiring life-long employees whose allegiance was to the



Chinese Journalist Hui Yin

Communist Party of China (CPA).

When the show was finally approved, Yin, along with three other young producers, was hired to develop a program plan. As producer and writer, Yin was responsible for selecting news topics, interviewing subjects, writing scripts, and editing. Unlike the format of earlier shows, the news magazine format adopts a fresh approach to news coverage that requires research, reporting, interviewing, and interpreting. "We presented profiles and stories on ordinary people and their lives from first hand research and interviews," Yin wrote in her Nieman application. "The show opened the door for real news and investigative reporting, a totally new concept for Chinese audiences."

"Although Oriental Horizon is a major step away from pure CPA propaganda, it's still very timid as it was difficult to report on hard news or anything that might be construed as politically controversial," Yin wrote.

Because there had been little or no exposure to Western topics, thoughts, or practices on CCTV, Yin proposed a show called Global Cinema in 1994. The show would use entertainment to broadcast information on Western culture. It would feature new films from overseas, film retrospectives, discussions of film technique, and interviews with directors, movie stars, and film critics. The proposal didn't get through the CCTV censor, so Yin took her pitch to Beijing TV (BTV). As a local station with more flexibility, BTV finally agreed to produce the show.

A 90-minute magazine show, Global Cinema was aired every weekend in Beijing and broadcast by 38 affiliated TV stations around China. The show quickly became a great hit among young people in Beijing. To get around censorship, "we deliberately mixed officially approved works with banned ones," Yin wrote. "We also used discussions of the approved soundtracks as a pretext to run segments of banned films, and presented banned films as demonstrations of innovative camera angles and editing techniques."

In 1996, Yin and other producers launched their first talk show, "Tell It As It Is," a 40-minute segment focusing on hot social issues and public concerns about modern China. It was aired on CCTV national channels 1, 2, and 3, three times every Sunday. "Tell It As It Is" remains one of the most popular shows in the country today, Yin noted.

When they started the program, they had little or no idea of how they were going to do it. "This is

similar to the situation of my professional drummer friend, who when he first bought a drum he didn't know whether to hit the left or the right side first," Yin said.

One of Yin's program stories was called "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child." In China, she said, parents often discipline their children by hitting or beating them. Since China is an authoritarian society, the relationship between parents and children is often a reflection in a much larger context of the relationship between the citizens and the government.

In her research for the show, Yin spoke to a taxi-driver whose 12-year-old daughter, a national go chess champion, was slapped across the face 12 times by his wife, who happened to be a teacher. When Yin took a camera crew to interview his wife about child-beating, a student of hers came running into her house seeking refuge from his father, who had just hit him with a baseball bat for not finishing his homework assignment. The father who had beaten his son, agreed to give Yin an interview. Both families were invited to be in the studio audience and the interviews with each family were aired during the taping of the show. Most of the live audience in the studio supported the actions by the parents. The father explained why he had to beat his child, saying, "I was beaten as a child, and that's why I've become successful. Now I'm using the same method on my son." The two children were in the studio audience, but no one in the audience could see them crying because they were in the front row. However, the television audience could.

Among the panelists was a doctor, his girlfriend, and two other women. A very successful woman on the panel described a childhood free of beatings. She talked about human dignity and respecting children's rights. There were Westerners among the audience who raised the issue of child abuse laws in the West. A lively debate on parental rights, children's rights, and human rights ensued, Yin recalled.

However, according to Yin, when the program was screened by the censors, they were told that any mention of human rights and Western laws had to be omitted. "Enough of the debate was preserved that I believe opened people's minds to the ideas of rights and the limits of power," Yin wrote. And despite censorship, the story won a "gold award," which is given monthly to the best program on CCTV.

After several screenings of "Tell It As It Is," a complaint and numerous letters commenting on various episodes ended the show. "And everyone who worked on the show was required to go to 'meetings' in which our programs were criticized for 'turning CCTV into a free forum,'" she said.

"We were told to correct our attitude," Yin said, adding that the show was reinstated at a later date, but was no longer the same. Yin said that overall there has been some improvement in programming. "It's human nature to want to do it better than before. But when you're trying to effect some changes, you encounter obstacles - your efforts are hamstrung by government censorship and control," she added.

"The government allows us to come up with new ideas for programming, but we can't do it completely the way we want it. I can't say that we don't have some good programs or shows, but content-wise, they're not as good as they once were. In other words, you can improve the quality of your work up to a certain point, but not to the extent that you'd like to see it. The media director, in particular, is very bad. He keeps everything under very tight control," she added.

There's nothing worse than "self-censorship" or "prior restraint" in journalism, Yin said. "My colleagues and I are in a constant battle over what we can or can't include in our tapes," she added. "It's not like Jiang is breathing down my neck and saying we can't do this or that. It's your immediate supervisor, and the boss of your immediate supervisor, and the boss of the boss of your immediate supervisor who does the controlling. There's a chain of command which oversees the media. And, finally, you do the dirty work yourself - you begin to censor your own work."

"But if you ignore this reality, you may find yourself having to make corrections five or six times. And if you don't want to spend all your time there, then you'll take out certain segments or sentences," she said.

(This is part one of a two-part interview. Part two will appear in the Dec. 19 issue of the Sampan.)

VOICES

A Rewarding Life in Newton

By Anping Shen

I became a resident of Newton by accident. I came to Boston University in the fall of 1988 to pursue my graduate education. Even with the school's scholarship, it was still difficult for me to make ends meet. A few weeks after my arrival in Boston I came across an ad for a live-in position at a human service program (a "group home") located in Newton. The position offered free room and board in exchange for overnight sleeping and taking care of three handicapped men on weekday mornings. I applied for the position and eventually took it without the slightest knowledge of the community I was going to be residing in.

I first learned about the "reputation" of Newton a few weeks after I moved there. I was at a Boston University professor's home to help him with some yard work. When I told him my address, he exclaimed, "Anping, we're living in Allston and you're living in Newton!" He then explained to me the "reputation" of Newton, its high-priced property, and its public school system.

I gained more appreciation of Newton's beauty when I took a Greyhound bus to New York a year later to meet my wife and son, who came to join me from China. I was shocked to witness for the first time many dilapidated urban scenes along the bus route to New York. To make matters worse, our luggage was almost robbed while I was purchasing the return bus ticket at the Port Authority station on the "infamous" - at least back then - 42nd Street in New York City. "If I had returned to China before taking that trip to New York," I have often noted, "my view of America would have been mostly based on my experience with Newton and Boston University."

Proudly called the "Garden City," Newton's landscape is abundant with beauty. But it's more than the city's natural charms that have appealed to me and my family. Newton's primary attraction for us has been its public school system. Or - educationally speaking - the city's unfailing commitment to quality education for every child.

A short while after my wife and son arrived in Newton, the Mayor's Community Liaison Office contacted us to see if we needed some help. When they learned that our 4-year-old son needed a nursery school education, a scholarship was sought for us. Because the nursery school was too far and we did not have a car then, free transportation was provided. I often joked with my son that he was treated like a member of the high-ranking official class in China whom the government provides with private cars for traveling. My son was a challenging kid because of various language, cultural, and emotional needs. However, we were happy to know that he was well-liked by the school teachers and staff. (I shared some of my son's educational experience in previous Sampan articles.)

The following year our son was again offered a scholarship - covering both the tuition and trans-

portation - to attend a multicultural pre-school program at a local public school. At the end of the school year, parents were informed of a possible funding cut for the following year and we were urged to write to the superintendent to make a case for continued support of this multicultural program, which I truly believed benefited my son's adaptation to American culture. Later I was told that my letter was read by the superintendent at the School Committee meeting. Fortunately, funding for the following year was secured.

During the following years, I learned from my community involvement and graduate programs at the Boston University School of Education that community support for a quality education for every child, particularly those who are disadvantaged, is believed to be the true spirit of American public education. The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the home of Horace Mann, the father of American public education. Newton has been a proud guardian of what educators have often referred to as Mann's "Common School Agenda."

Nevertheless, I would not say that our experience in Newton has always been smooth sailing. We purchased a house a couple of years ago in a north side Newton neighborhood - or village, as they are commonly called here. My son had a rough time when he first transferred to the neighborhood elementary school. He was physically and emotionally "bothered" inside and outside of the school by some of the "old kids on the block." While we had heard about similar incidents in the past, we, like many other Asian parents, were not quite comfortable with such emotionally charged events. We were greatly troubled at the time, and contemplated, for a while, putting our son in a private school. Fortunately, our confidence in the Newton public schools outweighed the private school approach. We worked with the classroom teachers, the school social worker, and the principal to deal with the situation. Meanwhile, I became more involved in the school's activities and was elected a parent-member of the school council. My experience on the school council and involvement in other activities turned out to be a constructive experience for me, my son, and, yes, for the school as well. At his elementary school graduation ceremony, my son was chosen by his classmates as the graduation speaker, and his speech was warmly received. It was a happy ending for my son's elementary school experience.

Fortunately, Newton has offered me many opportunities to participate in community activities. Six years ago my son started attending the Newton Chinese Language School, which has been operating on weekends at a Newton middle school. I was first involved in the school's parent council, and was later elected vice principal and principal. Currently, I am serving as

the chairman of the Newton Chinese Language School Board. Boosted by the increasing interest in Chinese language and culture in Newton and the surrounding communities, as well as support from the Newton School Department, our Chinese school has been experiencing a robust growth, with its student population more than doubling during the past few years.

In recent years, I have been expanding my role as a concerned parent, education professional, and Chinese community leader. When I learned that the budget of the Newton Free Library could be cut, I wrote a letter to the mayor to appeal for more support for the library, while expressing appreciation for the library's first major purchase of Chinese reading materials. When I was contacted by the Newton Public Schools regarding grant applications for Chinese language and cultural projects, I wrote a strong letter of support on behalf of the Newton Chinese Language School. Our Chinese community has certainly been very appreciative of the Newton Public Schools' commitment to cultural diversity and academic quality, seeing it as the hallmark of its excellence.

It has often been lamented that as a minority group, Asians in American society have significant obstacles - visible and invisible - to overcome before they can enter into mainstream society. My past years' experience has more or less attested to the reality of this challenge. However, challenges could turn into opportunities, as a popular Chinese saying goes. My professional growth and community involvement have largely been positive and rewarding for the past decade.

Early this year I was appointed by the mayor as a member of the Newton Human Rights Commission Advisory Board after applying for the position. And this past summer, I was appointed by the Newton School Committee chairperson to be a community member of the Newton School Superintendent Search Committee, also after applying to serve in that position. It is a serious responsibility of the Search Committee to help find a qualified and competent superintendent to lead Newton's first-rate educational system. I'm in the process of seeking as much community input as possible. It is time, to rephrase President Kennedy's often quoted statement, to ask not what the community can do for us, but ask what we can and should do for the community!

When I first sent my son to the Chinese school, I thought it was only for his Chinese language and cultural learning. I have got more than I had bargained for. When I went to Newton, it was out of financial consideration for my graduate education. Now I have become an actively involved Newton community resident.

I'm glad that I made the move to the City of Newton.

(Anping Shen is a regular contributor to the Sampan.)

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The Cover: Chinese-language students at Newton's Underwood Elementary School.

R. O'Malley photo

Boston Center for the Arts

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COVER STORY



(L) New Newton Alderman-elect Amy Mah Sangiolo with her son George in front of their Newton home. (R) Wushu master Bo Sim Mark at her center in Newton.

Newton's Growing Asian Community

It's the day before Thanksgiving at the Underwood Elementary School in Newton. Gathered in the school gymnasium to take part in a special holiday program, the students are performing the kind of skits and songs that could likely be found in many schools across the US today. That is, with one exception. When it's time for one group of third and fourth graders to perform, they don special hats and begin to sing a Chinese song - with an almost perfect Mandarin accent, says one native speaker in the audience.

The students are participating in an innovative Newton Public School system program in which children learn Chinese starting from grade three. Initially financed with a federal grant, the elementary school Chinese language program is meant to "prepare our Newton kids to interact with whole world," says program manager and head teacher Jie Gao.

"This is a global world," adds Gao, who explains that the school system plans to add a fifth grade Chinese class next year and that eventually students interested in studying Chinese language should be able to take Chinese courses from grade three through high school. The Newton Schools currently have some Chinese language programs for high school and middle school students.

The development of the elementary-level Chinese program isn't the first time that the Newton educational system has thought globally. For more than 15 years the school system has had a student and teacher exchange program with Jie Shan Middle School in Beijing, considered one of the city's best secondary schools. Each year four or five students from China attend school in Newton while their Newton counterparts attend school in China.

While it's hasn't been Newton's Chinese language programs specifically that have drawn an increasing number of Chinese to move to the city in recent years, many Chinese says its the reputation of the city's schools and the overall multicultural perspective of the city that have led them to purchase homes in this Boston suburb.

Although the Newton Asian population in the 1990 US census was only about 4,000, some people estimate that it has been growing annually by about 1000 during the 1990s. Like the Asian population in suburban communities such as Quincy and Malden, Newton's Asian population reflects the growth in Asian immigration over the last 15 to 20 years. But while Malden's and Quincy's Asians are generally Southeast Asians and Cantonese from mainland China, Newton's Asians tend to have more diverse backgrounds. The Newton Chinese population has traditionally included many Taiwanese, but it also has Chinese with Cantonese backgrounds and an increasing number of immigrants from mainland China who speak Mandarin.

Although many Chinese find Newton's school system, housing, and neighborhoods attractive, the high price of real estate in the city tends to limit the Chinese population there to professional families with relatively high incomes. Newton has become a bedroom community for professional Chinese who work in Boston or in the high-tech industry along Route 128. While Yen says a significant number of Newton Asians are professionals, she notes there are also restaurant owners and others with non-professional jobs.

In addition to being attracted to the city's high-quality school system, many Chinese are also attracted to the city's reputation for tolerance. "Newton seems to have a reputation for multiculturalism," says Jane Yen, the current president of the Greater Boston Cultural Association (GBCCA) in Newton.

Yen adds that the city also has significant Russian, Japanese, and Korean populations. "This community seems to have less discrimination to new immigrants," says Yen.

And while some residents have at times experienced subtle forms of discrimination, overall the local Chinese interviewed by the Sampan say they feel comfortable living in Newton. "I haven't heard my friends complain they have been discriminated against by anyone," says Yen.

Like many residents of Newton, Jennifer Hu said she was drawn to the city because of the reputation of its public school system. A volunteer in the high schools and the mother of two children who have attended Newton schools, Hu observes first hand the city's growing Asian population. "The number has been growing a lot," she says. "In the beginning, if I went to the school I didn't see so many Asian kids."

Hu, who, along with her husband, came here as a student from Taiwan, says the Newton Asian population consists largely of first-generation Chinese and their children. Like others, she says the city's Asian population is a diverse one. She learned about its diversity first hand when she tried to organize an Asian community group in the past. She says she often found it difficult to get people involved in the organization. And those who did express interest often had different backgrounds and sometimes had difficulty communicating with each other. There were people from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and mainland China, and their backgrounds often influenced their thinking and attitudes, she says.

In some instances, she adds, "we have more problems to connect with each other than with other groups" because of the different backgrounds.

"In general I think it's a wonderful city," says Hu, who believes Chinese are drawn to Newton because of its proximity to Boston and the welcoming attitude of the city's government. And while there have been instances of racial discrimination in the past, "the incidents are very few," she says. She recalls hearing people complain about the police taking sides in an accident and a local Stop & Shop where Asians complained about receiving rude treatment. "We complained about that," she says.

And while Hu says her son was harassed on the school bus about 10 years ago, she believes less of this occurs now because people become more used to Asians as the population grows. "Now I don't see many problems with my kids," says Hu, whose son attends the high school.

Living in a city in which the Asian population is still relatively small, Hu and others say they get along well with their non-Asian neighbors, though some people are more willing to cross racial lines to develop friendships than others. "I probably have more American friends than Asian friends," says Hu, who adds that many Asians "probably still associate with Asian friends."

Hu believes it's important to get involved in city activities and attend local meetings to present the Asian community's point of view on issues. "If we didn't attend the meeting no one would say anything for us," she says of one instance in which Asians complained about an incident of discrimination in the past. "I wish more Asians would write letters to the editor." She says she sees few Asian parents at local PTA meetings.

Hu, who recently worked on Amy Mah Sangiolo's campaign for alderman-at-large, believes that many Asians in the community haven't a "chance to communicate with the real American world. So they don't have this idea of trying to understand what is happening" in the city, she says. In trying to get people interested in voting in the recent election, she says many local Asians would often tell her that they weren't political. For first generation Asians, time is often dedicated to jobs and families rather than local community activities, she says.

The growth of Newton's Asian population was almost certainly a factor in Amy Mah Sangiolo's victory over Roderick MacLeish in the Nov. 4 election for alderman-at-large in Newton. Sangiolo squeaked to victory in a photo-finish race by a mere 12 votes. In fact, it took some time to determine who actually won the race. Sangiolo was initially told she had won the race, but a short while later, with her supporters celebrating at her home, she was told that MacLeish had won by 52 votes. Although she was initially reluctant to request a recount, she decided to do so at the urging of her supporters. With both sides observing, Sangiolo came out on top in the recount by a mere 12 votes.

Although Sangiolo says she's unsure how significant a role Asian voters played in her victory, she feels certain that reaching out to them helped her cause. And with her victory decided by a handful of votes, it's safe to say that any Asians she inspired to get out and vote on Nov. 4 were crucial to her victory. In the weeks before the election, Sangiolo made an effort to tap the Asian vote by phoning Asian residents to ask for their support and urging them to register. She also contacted the GBCCA in Newton, where she presented her views on issues before the election.

Sangiolo suggests that her visibility as an alderman may encourage more Asians to get involved in Newton's political life. As things stand now, "there isn't really a network," says Sangiolo, who believes that the Newton Asian community needs to develop more networks and take advantage of the GBCCA and the local Chinese-language radio station to become a more effective political force in the city.

Her victory, she suggests, "shows that Asians can get politically active and involved. Hopefully it will serve as an example to get more Asians involved in local government," she adds.

"Think what a difference you can make with several votes," adds GBCCA's Yen. "I think it's a good lesson to other people." Yen says Sangiolo's victory also showed how important it is for Asians to begin registering and voting in larger numbers. "We want to encourage [residents] to go and register to vote," she says, adding that several GBCCA members became actively involved in Sangiolo's campaign, which emphasized development, envi-

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COVER STORY

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ronmental, and education issues.

While some residents suggest that a major obstacle to Newton's Asian population becoming a political force in local politics is its lack of organization, the GBCCA in recent years has been taking on an increasingly high-profile role in Newton, often serving as a go-between on issues involving local institutions and the Asian community.

Most recently the Newton-Wellesley Hospital has been collaborating with the organization to provide a workshop to teach Chinese elderly how to avoid losing their balance and falling. GBCCA also recently received a grant from the Foundation of Racial, Ethnic, and Religious Harmony to provide programs to introduce Newton School children to various aspects of Chinese culture.

Founded by a group of Chinese in 1956 at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Dorchester, the organization was located in Weston before purchasing its current headquarters at 437 Cherry Street in West Newton in 1993.

The organization's goals are to promote public awareness of Chinese culture and heritage; enhance the well-being, civil rights and the image of Chinese Americans; and provide a multicultural, bilingual environment for young people. The GBCCA currently runs a Chinese School on Sundays and has numerous after-school and evening educational programs on arts and culture for both youths and adults. It has also been playing a prominent role in Boston's First Night celebration and other local festivals and events.

Founded by Dr. Robert Yuen and others, the organization was in part created to counteract the subtle forms of discrimination some Chinese felt at a time when the Chinese population was much smaller than it is today, says Yen. A goal was to



GBCCA President Jane Yen in front of the organization headquarters in Newton.

reduce misunderstandings between Chinese and non-Chinese that could lead to discrimination by letting more people know about Chinese culture, she says.

For many Asian residents of Newton GBCCA offers a sense of community that might otherwise be lacking. "Through the GBCCA there's a very strong sense of community," says Jane Hwang, who works for BankBoston.

And while Hwang says she gets along well with her largely non-Asian neighbors, she says she is also "very involved with the Chinese community of West Newton."

Living in a largely non-Asian city has not been difficult for most Asians. "I think in general people are quite used to living around Asians," adds Hwang, who is originally from Taiwan and has two children attending Newton South High.

While one of her children was called names in school - a problem reported by other parents at various times - Hwang believes the problem was manageable. "Overall I wouldn't complain that it's an uncomfortable environment," she says. "I think there's a pretty decent percentage of Asian students."

In addition to the city's large immigrant population, Newton also has a growing number of American-born Chinese in their late 20s and 30s, she says.

Hwang notes that the city strives to quickly deal with instances of discrimination. "Newton tends to me more vocal" when it comes to human rights concerns, she says.

The city also tries to provide services that would be of interest to Chinese residents. The city, for example, invites Chinese performing arts groups to take part in local events and the Newton Public Library now has Chinese-language books and videos, she says.

A member of the Newton Human Rights Commission, Hwang says several incidents of discrimination against blacks have been brought to the attention of the committee as well as an incident at the Chestnut Hill Mall in which an Asian woman shopping with a non-Asian friend was accused of shoplifting and was treated harshly.

Overall, though, Asians generally see Newton as a welcoming environment. "I think in general I have very good things to say about Newton," says Hwang.

-Robert O'Malley

See the Taste of Asia in Boston Feature in the December 19 Sampan



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CALENDAR

Mayor Thomas Menino's 1997 Christmas Trolley Tour and Tree Lighting: Dec. 7, 1997, 1:15-2:30 P.M., Phillips Square, Chinatown. Come join Santa Claus, his reindeer, snowmen, gingerbread men and a host of other holiday characters as they sing, dance, and spread holiday cheer. Light snacks and refreshments will be served at the event, which will also include Asian performances.

A Concert For Peace: Dec. 8, John Hancock Hall, 180 Berkeley St., Boston. A Concert in memory of the victims of World War II. Sponsored by the Greater Boston Chinese Cultural Association. For info. call 332-0377.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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Job description available on request.

Machine Defeats Incumbents in Vote

It wasn't a good day for incumbents in the Nov. 30 annual Chinatown Neighborhood Council election.

Incumbents Wilson Lee, Paul Lee, and Mary Chin were defeated by newcomers who had the support of Frank and Billy Chin behind them.

The turnout was high in this year's election, with a record 3099 people casting votes at the Fleet Bank in Chinatown. Voters chose seven candidates to fill the seven Council positions which are up for re-election annually.

As in past elections, questions were raised about some of the tactics used by the winning slate to get its candidates elected, as well as voting procedures at the bank.

Edwin Chu received 1653 votes and Anne

Marie Booth received 1368 votes to win the two available seats in the "organization" category. Defeated was incumbent Paul Lee, of the Chinese Economic Development Council, who received 1322 votes.

Hung Goon won the one available "agency" seat by defeating incumbent Mary Chin 1667 to 1278.

In the "business category," Wilson Lee, outgoing president of the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, was defeated by Cathy Chan 1747 to 1232. Chan is associated with Jumbo Seafood Restaurant in Chinatown.

And in the "other" category, former Council member Jason Chung defeated Mei Tung Market owner Richard Kong by a 1620 to 1384 margin.

Incumbent Father Hugh O'Regan received 763

votes and incumbent Mary Soo Hoo received 994 to win the two seats available in the "resident" category. The two ran unopposed in the election.

As in past elections, candidates ran on opposing slates. Sharing one slate - called the Dream Team - were Mary Chin, Paul Lee, Anne Marie Booth, Wilson Lee, and Richard Kong. The only candidate on that slate to win was Booth. On the other slate - which had the support of the Chin brothers - were Edwin Chu, Hung Goon, Cathy Chan, and Jason Chung. Every member of that slate was elected.

Observers said the Chin brothers used their connections to restaurant workers and others in the community to get votes for the slate they were supporting.

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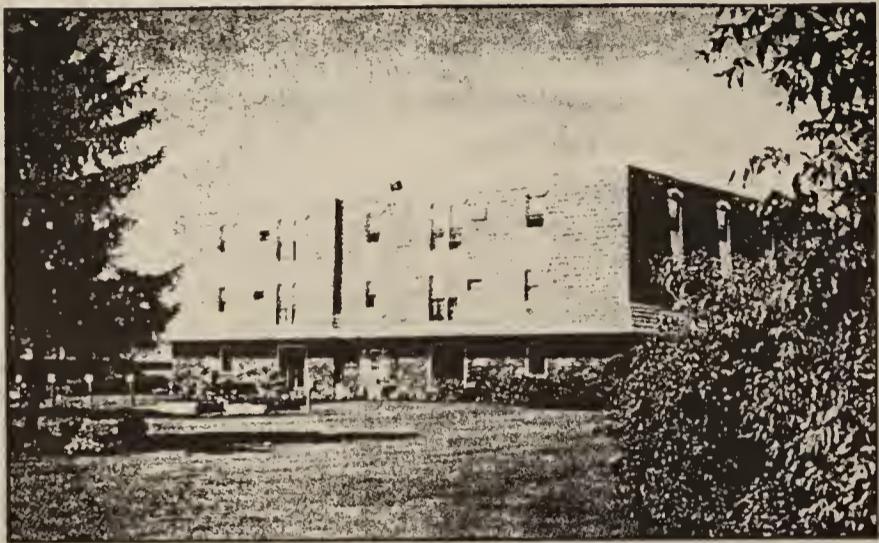
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(三) 思想不勞

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不怕動，腦不怕用」的道理，因此人也應「活到老，學到老」，不要以為年高再學新知識太遲，這不僅對增長技藝有利，也對健康防衰有益。

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聖誕節慶祝 與文化活動

接踵而來。十一月七日星期日下午一時十五分至二時三十分，在華埠舉行點亮聖誕樹的活動，地點在夏里臣街與益士街路口的菲利浦廣場。曼寧諾市長將參加此典禮，還有聖誕老人的彩車及雪人、薑餅形象，並有歌舞表演與茶點招待。

波士頓公園 (Boston Common)



的聖誕樹亮燈儀式也在十二月七日

舉行，時間是下午四時至六時，此活動迄今已是第五十六年，今年的活動亦有歌舞表演和節日彩車。

聖誕節期間是上演傳統節日劇

目《胡桃鉗》(The Nutcracker)。

迪斯尼的另一個著名動畫片《美女和野獸》(Beauty & The Beast)

則改編成了百老匯舞台劇，來波士頓演出的時間是明年七月，但預售票已開始發售。上述演出購票都可電 1-800-931-2787。

節日免費停車

為方便駕車人節日期間進城購物，波士頓市區的停車計時表在十一月二十九日至十二月二十七日期間實行星期六兩小時免費停車，這是波士頓曼寧諾市長、市交通局及泊車檢查辦公室給民眾的節日禮物，有關部門將張貼二百五十張紅綠節日泊車標誌，通知駕車者可享用周六免費停泊計時表兩小時的待遇。此外，十一月二十八日～星期五和十二月二十四日(星期三～也實行兩小時免費停車)。

哀悼南京大屠殺六十周年

樂學院作曲教授。

《為和平而歌》

波士頓音樂會

的主辦單位是大波士頓中華文化協會曆史回顧小組 ARCH (Action to Revisit Chinese History) 和亞洲

廣播電台，除音樂會外，還籌辦將在麻省理工學院舉行曆史圖片展覽及討論會，籌備小組今年夏天曾舉行募捐活動。此次聽說全美「紀念

南京大屠殺受難同胞聯合會」要在紐約舉行《為和平而歌》音樂會，及回顧小組特地與有關人士聯絡，想請來波士頓演出一場，雖然籌備時間倉促，但仍邀本地文藝團體共同參加，在各團體的大力支持下，將一台具有特別意義的音樂會獻給廣大觀眾。

今年十二月十三日是日本軍國主義在第二次世界大戰中犯下的罪行「南京大屠殺」六十週年，「珍珠港事件」則過了第五十五個年頭，而在南京無辜受害的三十萬中華骨肉同胞的亡靈仍在召喚後人；歷史不容歪曲，忘記曆史就沒有未來。身在海外的華人同胞應該牢記六十年前民族的冤屈，而美國人民也該不忘珍珠港的傷痛，不要因為向日本丟過原子弹，就饒恕了軍國主義的罪行。為了讓中美人士共同緬懷《為和平而歌》音樂會(A Concert for Peace)，時間是十二月八日星期一晚七時半，地點在波士頓漢考克音樂廳(John Hancock Hall)。

這場音樂會特邀海峽兩岸及本地的合唱團與文藝團體參加，演出《金陵祭》、《黃水謡》、《游擊隊歌》、《松花江上》等曆史與現代歌曲。演出團體

有來自中國大陸的「愛樂男聲合唱團」，由北京的中央樂團、中央歌舞劇院、中央音樂學院、總政歌舞團等近十個音樂團體院校中幾十名高水平歌唱演員組成；來自台灣的「郵聲合唱團」，由台北地區愛好歌桂萍、男高音歌唱家段小毅等。音樂會中演出的《金陵祭》是著名作曲家金湘特為本次音樂會譜寫作詞並親自指揮。金湘自幼學習音樂，並在海外發展，他的音樂創作，其作品風格多樣，有大型歌劇、交響樂、協奏曲、大合唱《原野》、《楚霸王》等極獲成功，他還出版過音樂評論著作。金湘在九十年代在美國幾家音樂學院訪問、工作、進修，目前他是中國音

劇以往的演出極受歡迎，因而第四度重返波士頓。

《西貢小姐》(Miss Saigon)

亦將於一九九八年一月十四日至二月二十八日重返波士頓在王安中心上演。

利中心將上演迪斯尼冰上舞劇《阿拉丁》(Aladdin)。

迪斯尼的另一個著名動畫片《美女和野獸》(Beauty & The Beast)

則改編成了百老匯舞台劇，來波士頓演出的時間是明年七月，但預售票已開始發售。上述演出購票都可電 1-800-931-2787。

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牛頓市的亞裔社區

朱偉憶

競選險勝的亞裔女性

SANGILOO夫婦命名的信托基金，這筆錢將用於查里斯河水質清潔及其他社區計劃。

牛頓市(NEWTON)是波士頓西部的一個以富裕、安靜、教育系統優越而聞名的良好居住區。在今年十一月初剛結束的該市政府機構的選舉中，一位亞裔女性馬惠美(Amy Mai Sangiolo)當選為牛頓市府議員。她是該市歷史上第一位參加競選並當選的亞裔，而且是位女性，何況她只以十二票領先對手當選的競選過程中，還有著曲折的故事。

在位於牛頓西部查里斯河畔的住宅中，三十三歲的年輕母親馬惠美抱著一歲半大的幼子，競選獲勝並未使她顯得欣喜若狂，面帶疲倦的馬惠美說：「說實在的，競選的幾個月，對我來說真如惡夢，不管是輸是贏，我只是盼望這一切盡快過去，可以多些時間照顧我的寶寶。」然而，她不否認競選勝的意義，這不是她個人的勝利，而是她母親是來自中國廣東的移民，而她的母親則是生於日本的日裔。她本人曾在華盛頓特區任律師，兩年前因丈夫在麻州找到新職業而舉家遷來，她的父母一起住在購得的兩家庭屋中，屋旁，祖父母是來自中國廣東的移民，而她的母親則是生於日本的日裔。她本人曾在華盛頓特區任律師，兩年前因丈夫在麻州找到新職業而舉家遷來，她的父母一起住在購得的兩家庭屋中，屋旁，

馬惠美的父親是出生於美國的華裔，祖父母是來自中國廣東的移民，而她的母親則是生於日本的日裔。她本人曾在華盛頓特區任律師，兩年前因丈夫在麻州找到新職業而舉家遷來，她的父母一起住在購得的兩家庭屋中，屋旁，

馬惠美表示：由於麻州的律師執照需要另行考試，而她剛剛生了兒子亦

想多照顧家庭，因此來到此地後尚未重操舊業，更沒想到會踏上政途，促

使她參選的正是她家屋後查里斯河畔的

一座廢舊庫房改建成寫字樓和大型停車庫，雖然這項工程並不直接影響她家

的產業，但她仍被鄰居帶領參加了鄰

區對該工程的反對活動，憑她以往任律師和參與若干環境保護項目的經驗，

她和丈夫訴諸法庭後得到開發公司十

萬元賠償。馬惠美認為鼓勵她採取行動的是全體社區民衆對該工程異口同聲的

反對態度，雖然他們夫婦出面打官司，但勝利應屬於整個鄰區，因此她堅持要

開發商貢獻三十萬元作為一項信託基

金來支持環保計劃和社區關心的項目

。開發商也同意再捐獻二十萬元給以

封面故事

牛頓亞裔社區的增長歷史

馬惠美競選市議員的事例也表明

牛頓市吸引居民的是其方便的交

通，有九十號收費公路和九號路貫穿

與當地亞裔人口的增加分不開。據統

計，在牛頓市八萬五千人口中，亞裔

在當地美國民眾心目中樹立起很高威望，許多人鼓勵她參加今年的市政府改選競爭。馬惠美也感到要想真正獲得

社會的重視，必須要在政治體制中有自己的代表，尤其牛頓地區亞裔人口已達到相當數量，卻從來沒有人參與政

治競選，因此勇敢地站出來參選，也使在牛頓居住時間並不很長的馬惠美有機會接近本地的亞裔社區。

在十一月初選舉之後，最初的消

息是，馬惠美僅以五十余票之差輸給了

對手，雖然她已獲得了九千多選票的參選，我們許多人都哭了，本地的許多美國人都選她，但可惜的是我們的很多

亞裔卻沒有去投票。盡管我們也做了宣傳，但我自己的熟人朋友都有不少沒去投票。經過兩周多的選票重數，結果峰迴路轉：馬惠美以九千六百四十票僅超出對手十二票，她終於獲得了勝利

，她不至於以微少差距而失利。

雖然仍有亞洲傳統觀念的馬惠美感到不管輸贏自己已盡力而為，希望放棄這兩個在當地增長最快的社區民衆的文化需要；該圖書館近幾年還舉辦了數位亞裔藝術家的美展及多次有關亞裔文化的講座與活動。而牛頓市的公立小學則從去年起逐漸推廣中文作爲第二外語的課程。具有重視文化教育和接受多元化的牛頓市一直是吸引亞裔的市鎮之一。

實際上，直至十幾年前牛頓還曾是大波士頓郊區亞裔最多的一個市鎮，這就是爲什麼四十年前，大波士頓中華文化協會(GBCCA)能在牛頓誕生，

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牛頓市吸引居民的是其方便的交通，相距彼此不遠，卻每校生滿爲患，雖然學生們來自各個區鎮，但牛頓的華裔卻也善於精打細算，尤其是對經濟實力尚不很強的新移民來說，在租購房屋時也得考慮價格因素。曾擔任牛頓中文學校校校長並在牛頓一家房地產公司做經紀

人的于劍表示：雖然許多華人很感興趣在牛頓的亞裔社區聯繫與服務

，大波士頓華人文化協會(GBCCA)扮演著極爲重要的角色。這個成立於一九五六年

六年的民間社團，原只是個聯誼性的俱樂部組織。該協會現任主席熊晶介紹說：文協的創辦人之一是來自上海的袁韌標醫生，他當年在牛頓租房屋時遭到歧視性拒絕，因而感到作爲少數族裔聯合起來才能獲得社會承認。許多人也

感到，由於當年華裔較少，美國人對我們很不了解，因此歧視與偏見倒不一定來自成見而是因爲誤解。所以文協創辦的宗旨，就是要向美國社會宣傳中華文化化，同時也向華裔介紹主流社會，並爲同胞們提供彼此交流的場所。多年來，

隨著牛頓與大波士頓地區華人人口增長，文協的會員與活動也不斷增多，但以往因條件所限，只能分別租用不同場地舉辦活動，使大家感到不太方便。因而會員們考慮要有一處固定的會址，並於五年前購得了位於牛頓櫻桃街四三七號的一幢三層磚樓，購樓款項全來自會員會有的捐獻。有了固定會址之後，文協更加活躍，最近幾年是這個郊區華人社區最興旺發展的時期。目前，該協會有會員五百余家庭，遍及紐英

蘭省各地。文協出版一份月刊，並管有五

所中文學校，除位於牛頓的三所外，還

有全是福中中文學校及勒星頓中文學校

。該校最近已獨立管理，協會每年春秋

季各舉辦一次大型晚會，除聯誼娛樂

外也爲文協募集資金。文協舉辦的活動

更是多種多樣，從兒到晉英，從文體

運動、職業培訓、入籍教育等服務在這

個亞裔人口不算少的市鎮也極少見；但

不可否認，當地社區自發的亞裔文化建

設卻爲其他地區樹立了榜樣。身爲牛頓

的亞裔人，我不禁爲我們的社區感到驕

傲，我們社區的進一步反思。

馬惠美表示：任何人的競選成功

都不會是個人的勝利，而是社區、群體

的力量體現，我之所以參選，只是想

爲其他人，尤其是少數族裔、女性和平

時代做個先鋒，讓大家知道，在美

的越南華裔說，當年遷往郊區實在是因

亞裔居民也抱怨，這裏不要說與波士

頓比，就是與昆士、摩頓等地相比，

也缺少那種聯繫緊密又有一定影響的

亞裔社區服務性組織，因此少有政府官

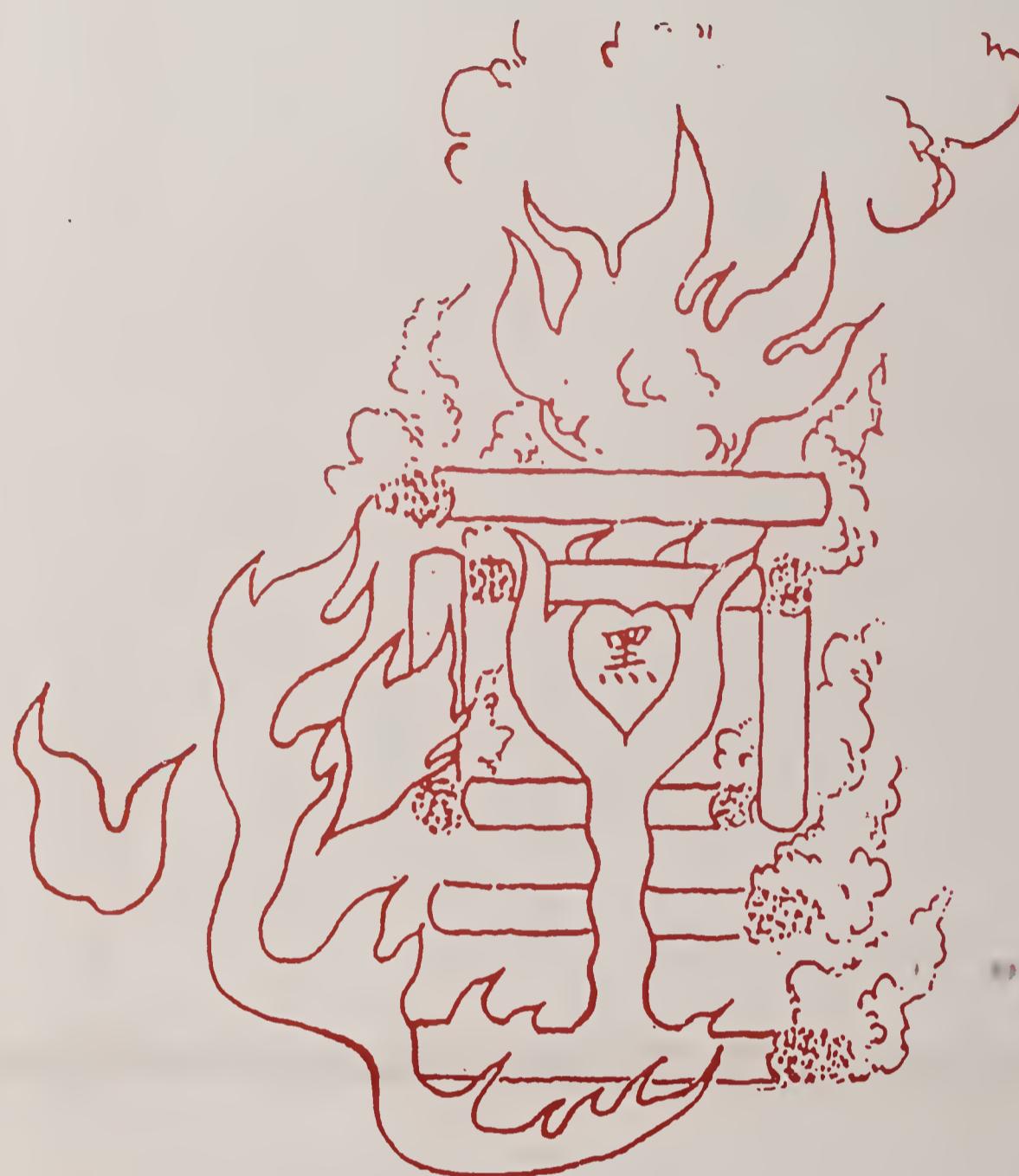
方資助的社區項目，針對亞裔的醫療金

額比，就是與昆士、摩頓等地相比，

也缺少那種聯繫緊密又有一定影響的

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